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ABSTRACT

In concert with a rising interest in history education, there is concern about the quality of education and certification of history teachers. Many researchers, theorists, and specialists have weighed in on the issue of teacher preparation and certification. To what extent are history teachers prepared and certified to teach the discipline? This Digest discusses: (1) general findings about out-of-field teaching; (2) findings about state teacher certification requirements; (3) findings about national and state content standards for teacher preparation and licensure; and (4) recommendations for improving preparation and certification requirements for history teachers. (Contains 11 references.) (BT)

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State Certification Requirements for History Teachers

By Sarah Drake Brown

In concert with a rising interest in history education, there is concern about the quality of education and certification of history teachers. Many researchers, theorists, and specialists have weighed in on the issue of teacher preparation and certification. To what extent are history teachers prepared and certified to teach the discipline? This Digest discusses (1) general findings about out-of-field teaching, (2) findings about state teacher certification requirements, (3) findings about content standards for teacher preparation and licensure, and (4) recommendations for improving preparation and certification requirements for history teachers.

Out-of-Field Teaching in History and Social Sciences. According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics School and Staffing Survey, in 1999-2000 71% of middle school history teachers lacked a college major in history or certification in history; 11.5% lacked a college major, a college minor, or certification in history. At the high school level, 62.5% lacked a college major or certification in history and 8.4% lacked a college major, college minor, or certification. The results for social science teachers were not quite as dismal, but they were notable nonetheless. Most striking is that the percentage of middle and high school teachers who had neither a college history major nor certification increased since 1987-1988. The high school increase was slight—62.1% to 62.5%. But at the middle school level, out-of-field teachers increased from 67.5% to 71% (Gewertz 2002).

Certification of History Teachers. In the United States, each state assumes responsibility for licensing its teachers. State departments of education, boards of education, or professional standards boards engage in licensing teachers. Teacher licensure, often referred to in the lexicon interchangeably as certification, entails establishing policies designed to distinguish between those who are qualified to teach and those who are not. While specific rules and procedures for certification vary from state to state, states generally follow similar guidelines. State governments tend not to emphasize history in their requirements for the certification of social studies teachers. Many universities require a major in history, and some states recommend a major or significant credit hours in history, but no state requires a major in history for teachers who are licensed to teach history courses. To complicate matters further, 46 states have established alternative certification programs. Key findings of a recent 50-state survey about the certification of history teachers (Brown and Patrick 2003, 3-4) include:

- Nine states require a minor in history for certification at the secondary level.
- Two states require a minor in history for certification in middle school.
- Sixteen states leave certification to the discretion of the universities.
- In four states, passing a content test is the only requirement for certification.
- Certification in social science or social studies (rather than specifically in history) is abundant.

Some states currently are involved in a movement away from course hour specifications and toward a demonstration of proficiency in order to fulfill certification requirements. New Hampshire, North Carolina, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Wyoming have either instituted the use of proficiencies or are in the process of doing so. In Wisconsin, for example, a new law stipulates that to achieve certification teachers must demonstrate competency in the subjects they will teach. Each university in the state is in the process of devising appropriate course work and testing that will enable candidates to demonstrate competency and obtain licensure. The law will go into effect in 2004. Teachers at all three levels will be required to demonstrate competency, and those who are certified as social studies teachers in grades 7-12 will be responsible for proving they are capable of teaching content found in the Wisconsin Model Academic Social Studies Standards.

Content Standards in Teacher Preparation and Licensure. As part of the standards movement nationwide, some states have created content and performance standards for the preparation and certification of teachers. Most states identify these standards as the minimal qualifications teachers are expected to demonstrate upon licensure. While many states have developed general standards for their teachers, a recent survey investigated content and performance standards designed specifically for history, social science, or social studies teachers. Here is a summary of findings from that survey (Brown and Patrick 2003, 4-5):

- Thirty-four states have developed history, social science, or social studies content standards for teachers.
- Eleven of the thirty-four states with content standards for teachers have developed history-specific content standards for teachers.
- Nine states use NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) standards, which are based on *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* of the National Council for the Social Studies.
- Twelve states refer to their certification requirements in place of standards.

Content standards for teachers, which are promulgated by state education departments, are addressed by university-based programs of teacher education. State standards that minimize history within general social studies standards will likely result in less

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substantial treatments of history in university-based programs for teacher preparation.

Recommendations for Improvement of Teacher Preparation and Certification in History. The No Child Left Behind Act requires states to ensure that all teachers are "highly qualified" by the 2005-2006 school year. To be considered "highly qualified" teachers must "have solid content knowledge of the subjects they teach." A major in history is essential in the university-based education of history teachers. By contrast, a broad-field major in social studies will not adequately prepare prospective teachers of history. Research on teacher competency in history reveals the necessity of strong and deep preparation in the content of history (Wilson and Wineburg 1988; Wineburg 2001, 79-84). Given the importance of domain-specific knowledge in the preparation of history teachers, the following recommendations are offered about the education and state-based certification of history teachers:

1. Require an academic major in history as a condition of state certification for secondary school history teachers (National Council for History Education 1998).

2. Develop state-sanctioned standards for the preparation and certification of history that teachers simultaneously emphasize domain-specific content knowledge and subject-specific methods of teaching (Schwartz 2000; Thomas 1991).

3. Involve university departments of history directly and deeply in the preparation of history teachers (Pennell 2000; Ravitch 1997; Schwartz and Others 2000).

4. Require prospective history teachers to pass a state-mandated test of knowledge in history as a condition of teacher certification (National Council for History Education 1997).

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche, paper, or electronic full text from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; World Wide Web <edrs.com>; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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